

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 ROME 07130 181258Z  
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 OES-07 HEW-04 SS-15 NSC-05  
SP-02 L-03 H-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 MED-02  
IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11  
/098 W

-----056981 190405Z /63

R 181047Z APR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY ROME  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2176  
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE POUCH  
AMCONSUL GENOA POUCH  
AMCONSUL MILAN POUCH  
AMCONSUL NAPLES POUCH  
AMCONSUL PALERMO POUCH  
AMCONSUL TRIESTE POUCH  
AMCONSUL TURIN POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PGOV, ITV, VT  
SUBJECT: CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES APPROVES ABORTION BILL

REF: ROME 6293

1. SUMMARY. A REVISED ABORTION BILL, WHICH WAS APPROVED APRIL 14 BY THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, IS EXPECTED TO BE ALSO APPROVED SOON BY THE SENATE DESPITE STRONG VATICAN AND CATHOLIC CHURCH OPPOSITION. THE EXPECTED LEGISLATION--ONE OF THE MOST LIBERAL IN WESTERN EUROPE--WILL AVERT A DIVISIVE REFERENDUM WHICH HAS BEEN SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 11. END SUMMARY.

2. THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES APPROVED A REVISED ABORTION BILL ON APRIL 14 BY A VOTE OF 308 FOR AND 275 AGAINST. VOTING FOR THE BILL WERE THE COMMUNISTS, THE SOCIALISTS, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS,  
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PAGE 02 ROME 07130 181258Z

REPUBLICANS AND LIBERALS AND INDEPENDENTS ON THE LEFT. VOTING AGAINST WERE THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (DC), RADICALS, DEMOCRACIA PROLETARIAT (DP), THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATS AND THE NEOFASCISTS (MSI). THE BILL NOW GOES TO THE SENATE AND APPROVAL IS EXPECTED SOON. IF SENATE APPROVES, A REFERENDUM ON ABORTION, WHICH IS SET FOR JUNE 11, WILL BE CANCELLED.

3. PASSAGE OF THE BILL CAME AFTER THE PCI AGREED TO TWO DC-SPONSORED AMENDMENTS, WHICH WAS APPARENTLY THE MINIMUM DC PRICE FOR REFRAINING FROM OBSTRUCTING LEGISLATION, AND AFTER THE RADICAL PARTY GAVE UP A FILIBUSTER ATTEMPT TO DELAY THE BILL'S PASSAGE.

4. THE APPROVAL OF THE AMENDMENTS (WHICH PROVIDES A ROLE FOR THE HUSBAND ON ABORTION DECISION IN THE CASE OF MARRIED WOMEN, AND RAISED AGE FOR ABOTION WITHOUT PARENTAL CONSENT FROM 16 TO 18 YEARS) IS WIDELY CONSIDERED AS HAVING ASSURED PASSAGE OF BILL IN SENATE (WHICH UNEXPECTEDLY TURNED DOWN THE BILL AS DRAFTED BY THE CHAMBER IN JUNE 1977).

5. THE BILL CONTAINING THREE BASIC FEATURES--DECRIMINALIZATION OF ABORTION, SELF-DETERMINATION OF WOMAN IN FIRST 90 DAYS, AND ABORTION PAID FOR BY THE STATE--IS CONSIDERED THE MOST LIBERAL SUCH LEGISLATION TO BE PASSED BY A WESTERN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO DATE. HOWEVER, THE TWO LAST-MINUTE AMENDMENTS HAVE ANGERED FEMININE GROUPS, THE RADICALS AND OTHER LEFTIST PARTIES. FEMINIST GROUPS INCLUDING THE PCI-ORIENTED UDI WERE APARTICULARLY BITTER TOWARD THE PCI FOR AGREEING TO THE AMENDMENTS, ACCUSING IT OF CHANGING ITS POSITION FOR POLITICAL REASONS. IN FACT, PCI DID JUST THAT: IT WENT ON RECORD AS SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO FIND POINTS OF AGREEMENT WITH ALL THE DEMOCRATIC FORCCES "ON THE DELICATE SUBJECT OF ABORTION," AND THEN IT ABSTAINED ON A KEY VOTE (RE THE RAISING OF THE MINIMUM AGE FROM 16 TO 18) STATING THAT "THE PARTY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 ROME 07130 181258Z

COULD NOT IGNORE THAT THE OVERALL CONTEXT HAD CHANGED." WHILE THE PSI VOTED AGAINST, THE PCI ABSTENTION PERMITTED THE AMENDMENT TO PASS. (COMMENT: THE PCI'S ACTIONS ON ABORTION ILLUSTRATE ONCE AGAIN ITS STRATEGY FOR ESTABLISHING PARTY IMAGE AS MODERATING FACTOR IN ITALIAN POLITICAL SCENE.)

6. THE PASSAGE OF THE BILL HAS ALSO RENEWED INTENSIFIED CAMPAIGN BY THE VATICAN, THE CHURCH AND CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS THE MOVEMENT FOR LIFE AND CATHOLIC ACTION, AGAINST ABORTION. THE VATICAN'S OSSERVATORE ROMANO AND RADIO HAVE REACTED IMMEDIATELY AND STRONGLY AGAINST THE BILL AND HAVE CALLED ON THE SENATE TO DISAPPROVE THE BILL.

7. OBSERVERS NOTE THAT PARLIAMENTARY PASSAGE OF BILL WILL CONSTITUTE SECOND GREAT DEFEAT OF VATICAN AND CHURCH IN ITALY SINCE PASSAGE OF DIVORCE LEGISLATION IN 1970 AND THE SUBSEQUENT DEFEAT (BY 2 TO 3 MARGIN) OF A CATHOLIC-SPONSORED REFERENDUM TO OVERTURN THE LAWY IN MAY 1974. THE GOVERNMENT HAS STAYED NEUTRAL ON THE ISSUE. THE DC, WHILE MAINTAINING A UNITED FRONT AGAINST THE PRINCIPLE OF ABORTION, HAS REFRAINED FROM ADOPING OBSTRUCTIONIST TACTICS. DC MODERATION ON ISSUE DUE TO REALIZATION THAT A REFERENDUM WOULD NOT ONLY BE EXTREMELY DIVISIVE FOR THE COUNTRY

AND TO FACT THAT AN AFFIRMATIVE VOTE ON THE REFERENDUM WOULD  
OVERTURN EXISTING LEGISLATION WITH CONSEQUENCE THAT ABORTION WOULD  
THEN BE ENTIRELY UNREGULATED. DC ACQUIESCENCE MAY ALSO BE RELATED  
TO A WIDELY SHARED PERCEPTION THAT THE ELECTORATE AS A WHOLE  
(INCLUDING PART OF THE DC) WANTED A REVISION IN THE STRICT  
ABORTION LEGISLATION IN FORCE SINCE THE MUSSOLINI ERA. THE  
VATICAN AND THE ITALIAN CHURCH ALSO REALIZE THIS BUT FEEL COMPELLED  
ON MORAL GROUNDS TO MAINTAIN THE TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC POSITION  
AGAINST ABORTION. GARDNER

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## Message Attributes

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**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
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